

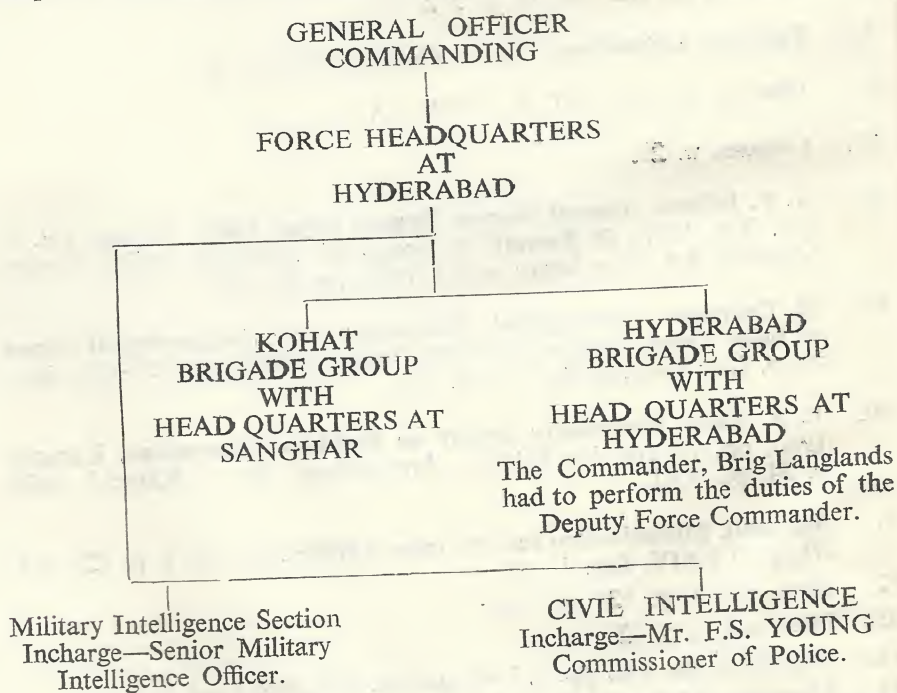
HUR OPERATIONS IN SIND

Martial Law—1942

II

Major Gen. (Retired) Wisal Mohammad Khan

Owing to the pernicious activities of the Hurs the Civil Administration in Sind had completely broken down and there was a serious law and order problem in the area. The situation warranted the promulgation of Martial Law so the needful was done on 1st June 1942. A force called the upper Sind force was raised and placed under the command of Maj. Gen. R. Richardson. The force consisted of two Brigade groups and attached troops, its organisation in broad outline was:—



As the success or failure of the formation depended largely on the intelligence work hence it is imperative that some light should be thrown on the Intelligence set up of the organisation. F.S. Young, Commissioner of Police, was assisted by his special team and the Sind Police. The information emanating from this source was normally biased and had to be taken with a pinch of salt. Young being an experienced and capable officer sifted the

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SECTION



The writer is in the central row on the right

information effectively and hence little damage was done. The officer being a controversial figure necessitates a bit of his introduction.

Young was a successful dacoit in England and as the Government was incapable of arresting him. His Britannic Majesty gave him a pardon on the specific condition that he would go to India to round up and arrest the dacoits in that country. He accepted the offer and performed his task admirably both in Rajputana and Sind. He was a strange character a bachelor and a tectotaller who relished lassi and spinach. He was devoted to the task allotted to him by His Imperial Majesty and spent almost all his surplus income on his special team and informers. He had some sterling qualities and was a lovable person in spite of his shady profession in his young days.

On 9th June 1942 I was appointed Senior Military Intelligence Officer of the force. The intelligence Section consisted of three officers, three British other ranks and four Indian other ranks. Our duty was normal, that is, collection, collation and dissemination of information. Our task was made difficult by the notorious Police officials who were spreading vile rumours to damage the reputation of the Pir and his followers. Our other headache was the in-accuracy of the maps of Sind and therefore we had to spend considerable effort in producing maps of Nara area from the air photographs for the troops operating in that area.

Some of the Hur Fakirs were very shrewd and had organised an excellent intelligence system of their own. They used all possible sources for collection and dissemination of information. They deployed their informers consisting of men, women and children even in the areas occupied by the troops and also utilised the services of some of the government informers. A large number of the harmless Hurs and other people in the area also co-operated with the Fakirs. The employment of trackers for obtaining information about the troop movement in the dessert area saved their skin on numerous occasions.

Night curfew was imposed and orders were issued for depositing of arms and ammunition in the nearest police stations. Information about the fakirs and Hurs whereabouts had to be passed on to the nearest troops in the area. Non-compliance with these instructions was to result in drastic action against the defaulters.

.... The Hurs did not have much respect for these orders as their morale was very high. They rightly thought that the Martial Law was the result of their efforts which had completely paralysed the civil administration and thus rendered it ineffective. Their knowing of the bashing the British were receiving at the hands of the Germans and the Japanese in World War II gave them the impression that they will have no alternative but to vacate their aggression against India and thus Sind will be handed over to the Pir. This impression raised their tails considerably and therefore they decided to wait for an appropriate moment. In the meantime they decided to display some sort of co-operation by surrendering their useless or surplus weapons, ensuring that each man had an axe or a gun for his own use.

The general impression amongst the Hurs was that soon the Germans would invade London and the fall of the capital would result in the capitulation of the British Army. As a result of which the countries of the Common Wealth wrongly possessed by the Englishmen would be free from the usurpers. In such an eventuality the Government will have no alternative but to hand-over the Province to Pir Pagaro. They appreciated that under these circumstances the best course would be to avoid confrontation with the troops and achieve secrecy of information about the brotherhood. At this juncture I would like to state that if Hitler had not stopped Rommel's advance on Antwerp then the story of Dunkirk would have been different as the englishmen would have been more seriously mauled then hitterto. To the best of my belief most of the credit for sound appreciation and planning goes to the Pir himself.

The Fakirs resolved that they should continue to strive in the name the Pir and be prepared to sacrifice their lives for their cause. Therefore they continued their dangerous activities with complete disregard to Martial Law. The force retaliated by burning huts and hamlets and arresting indiscriminately the people suspected in the area. In order to facilitate

to work of the troops all the people in the area were ordered to move east of the Nara canal within a period of ten days. After the specified time any one found in the prohibited area was liable to be shot at sight. The said move inflicted untold miseries on the effected people and cattle.

The Hurs for their protection depended on sinking sand, and the lakes and the Jungles. They established their base in the Makki Dand Area in Sanghar for their operations. The terrain was very difficult for troops to operate hence it was considered safe. However, large scale air reconnaissance and troop movement by day and night in difficult terrain had a sobering affect on the people who through fear decided to follow the orders so as to avoid confrontation with the troops.

.... On 01 July 1942 we dropped a company of a Gurkha (Para) Battalion in the area to thoroughly comb the impregnable defences of the outlaws. In the meantime the troops of Kohat Brigade successfully linked with the para troops, burning all the huts enroute.

The molestation of impregnable positions of Hurs had a considerable terrorising effect on the people and therefore in order to keep up their morale the Hurs carried out raids on various villages and killed people suspected of spying for the troops. Their men killed in troop operations were called martyrs and buried with great respect whereas the casualties they inflicted on the people around were despised and condemned as traitors. They strongly believed that a spectacular action against the railways was likely to boost up the morale of the people of Sind.

The Fakirs planned the derailment of Bombay Mail on 6 September 1942, by building across the railway line an obstacle from tree trunks as they had no tools for the removal of fish plates. For the security of the plan the obstacle was to be built just before the arrival of the train. Luckily the train was running to new timing, an hour ahead of the old timing, thus the Hurs miscalculated the timing of the train and therefore could not build an effective obstacle as it was hurled in the air by the engine of the train. However, the derailment party was thoroughly amused by the incident. This incidents resulted in the strengthening of the security guards on the trains and effective patrolling of the railway lines as well as important canals to prevent them from breaching by the Hurs. The extent of floods caused by inundation of canals can be visualised from the photographs.

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Who ever has lived long enough to find out what life it, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.

Mark Twain